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SUBJECT: MFA ISSUES TOUGH STATEMENT AGAINST SAAKASHVILI

REF: MOSCOW 5371

Classified By: A/DCM Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1, (U) The MFA issued a strongly worded and lengthy statement on November 15 criticizing President Saakashvili for holding allegedly undemocratic elections, calling them a "open farce," and for using Russia as a scapegoat for political gain. Specifically, the MFA accused Saakashvili of commencing the campaign season under a state of emergency, maintaining restrictions on independent media, harassing opposition figures, preventing opposition candidates from mounting effective campaign by holding the elections only several weeks away and in the middle of holiday season (allowing for vote "falsification"), and maintaining an atmosphere of "Russophobia" in the campaign season.

12. (U) The statement continued that Saakashvili has used "tales" of airspace violation and missile launches, and most recently, reports of three Russian spies stirring mass demonstrations in Tbilisi and of Russian troop and equipment build-up in Abkhazia to create a "virtual" enemy. The statement noted that the UN Mission in Tbilisi did not find any evidence of an increase in Russian troops or arms in the region. The MFA statement concluded that Russia would "under no circumstances" interfere in Georgian internal affairs by sending emissaries to Tbilisi for "several-hour conversations" with political leaders (a dig at DAS Matthew Bryza's trip) and praised the "rational thinking" of the Georgian people.

13. (C) On November 16, MFA Fourth CIS Department Deputy Director Dmitry Tarabrin told us that UN Head of Mission in Tbilisi Arnault recently convened the Friends of Belarus to verbally convey the results of their investigation of the GOG's claims about increased Russian activity in Omchamir, Abkhazia. Tarabrin said the GOR was not surprised by the favorable finding, but hoped that the assessment from such a "reputable organization" as the UN Mission would put the issue to rest.

14. (C) Tarabrin reaffirmed Russia's willingness to meet with Georgian officials, noting the possibility of a meeting between FM Lavrov and FM Bezushvili on the margins of the upcoming OSCE Ministerial and a high-level Friends of Georgia meeting in the middle of December, but stressed that Georgia must be willing to engage in substantive and constructive discussions with Russia (reftel).

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